

# Guns in Schools

A Presentation to the Governor's School  
and Campus Safety Task Force

JULY 31, 2013  
RICHMOND, VA

JULY 31, 2013

ARMED PERSONS IN SCHOOLS: PRESENTATION TO GOVERNOR'S TASK FORCE

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# Guns in Schools

In Consultation with the Virginia Department of  
Criminal Justice Services

William V. Pelfrey, Jr., Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Criminal Justice and Chair, Homeland Security/Emergency  
Preparedness Program  
Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
[wvpelfrey@vcu.edu](mailto:wvpelfrey@vcu.edu)  
804.828.8467

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# Guns in Schools

## Overview

- The tragic shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary focused attention on safety in schools.
- The Governor's Taskforce on School and Campus Safety was formed to prevent such events in Virginia.
- Several pieces of legislation were proposed with the intent of enhancing school safety.
  - HB1557: Armed Persons in Schools
  - HB1730: Requiring School Resource Officers in all Schools
  - HB2277: Defining School Security Officer Position

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# Guns in Schools

## Review Process

Dr. Pelfrey was asked to objectively review each piece of legislation on several dimensions:

- Potential outcomes and efficacy of legislation
- Findings in scholarly research that inform these topics
- Legal and liability implications of ratification
- Fiscal consequences
- Organizational capabilities to effectively implement
- Potential psychological impacts on school administrators, teachers, students and law enforcement personnel.

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# Guns in Schools

## *HB 1557: Armed Persons in Schools*

**Summary:** Requires each school board to designate at least one of the following to secure a concealed carry permit and carry a concealed weapon on campus:

1. A teacher, principal, or other school employee
2. A volunteer with a concealed handgun permit
3. A retired law-enforcement officer

- Designations occur at the discretion of the school board.
- Minimum training standards are specified to prepare individuals to carry a concealed weapon and obtain certification in the storage, use, and handling of that concealed weapon.
- Requires that every school have at least one designee.

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## Liability associated with armed school personnel

Since the school board would specify or select the armed designee, the school board would incur significant liability, particularly in any of the following scenarios:

1. Armed designee accidentally shoots a student or school personnel during a critical incident;
2. Armed designee loses control of the firearm and it is used against others;
3. Armed designee intervenes in a non-critical incident, escalating it to a deadly force situation;
4. Law enforcement mistakes armed designee for an assailant and fire upon him/her.

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# Guns in Schools

## School and Organizational Issues

- School board is responsible for identifying at least one armed designee in each school.
  - How to choose among volunteers (potential discrimination complaints)?
  - What if no one volunteers?
- Storage of weapon on school grounds—gun safe, where to locate? Access?
- Carry weapon all the time or store in a safe?
- Psychological impact of knowing there is a gun in the school. Could affect school administrators, staff, teachers, and students. May provoke students to bring guns, communicates important message.
- Research on citizen use of firearms in defensive scenarios is mixed. These volunteers will not have law enforcement firearm training.
- Potential cost of training, equipping, insuring approximately 2000 (minimum) persons

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# Guns in Schools

## HB 1730: School Resource Officers in all schools

- Summary:** Requires all schools to collaborate with local law enforcement and place a school resource officer (SRO) in every school in the division.
- Currently there are 500-550 SRO's operating in Virginia. Not all are dedicated (assigned to a single school). Most often assigned to high schools.
  - There are approximately 2000 schools in Virginia. Approx 1100 elementary, 333 middle, 300 high schools, and 250 other schools.
  - Nationally, SRO's are in about 25% of high schools, less frequently in other schools
  - Scholarly research on SRO effectiveness suggests:
    - Presence of an SRO makes people feel safer
    - Some reduction in fighting, guns, and drug crimes at schools
    - Benefits in counselor/teacher role

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# Guns in Schools

## Issues with SRO requirement

- Key issue is cost. A uniformed officer costs about \$100,000 per year (salary, benefits, liability insurance, equipment, training, vehicle, etc.).
- Requiring the addition of 2000 SRO's would cost approx. \$200 million per year.
- In comparison, the largest Virginia law enforcement agency is State Police which is funded at approx. \$229 million with about 1850 sworn and 750 civilian employees.
- Additional cost of SRO training, concern over whether those officers would be pulled from other assignments. The legislation does not specify a funding source to cover these costs.
- The presence of an SRO does not guarantee school safety—an SRO was present at the 1999 Columbine shooting, exchanged gunfire with one of the two shooters, 11 more persons died.

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# Guns in Schools

## HB2277: Defines School Safety Officer

**Summary:** Changes current law which defines parameters of School Safety Officers. There would now be two employment designations: School Safety Officers and School Security Officers.

Safety Officer	Security Officer
Contract person, hired from a security company, etc.	Newly created position: retired or former law enforcement personnel
Existing language explaining their roles and responsibilities	Training and hiring criteria would need to be generated by VCSS
Hired and employed by School System	Could be paid from SRO Fund and employed by local law enforcement

- There is language which makes it amenable for retired law enforcement personnel to secure this employment with no detrimental impact on their retirement status/income.
- Schools are **NOT** required to have either Safety Officers or Security Officers.

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# Guns in Schools

## Implications of legislation

- There are approximately 850 current school safety officers working in about 20% (approx. 400) of Virginia's schools.
- Current school safety officers are unarmed, usually patrol halls, parking lots, direct traffic, watch doors, etc.
- Proposed school security officers would be employees of local law enforcement agencies but would work exclusively in schools.
- Liability insurance costs of several thousand per SSO/year—paid by school or law enforcement?
- Hiring and supervision issues—would new SSO be supervised and evaluated by school or by law enforcement? Dictates search and arrest capability.

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# Guns in Schools

## Emergent Themes

- All three legislation pieces point towards a desire to enhance safety of students and school personnel.
- There is no research to indicate that armed persons at schools can prevent or deter events like Sandy Hook or Columbine
- Key issues of cost and liability must be thoroughly considered prior to making decisions.
- Psychological impacts of armed persons (either school or law enforcement employees) should also be considered.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME. QUESTIONS?

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